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Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report outlines the initial steps of follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid from 8 to 12 April 2002, including the tasks and requirements of the United Nations programme on ageing of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as the focal point on ageing in the United Nations system.

The International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing, forms the basis for policy action to face the remarkable demographic transition currently under way. At the same time, the Madrid Plan of Action calls for increased and expanded efforts on the part of Member States, the United Nations system entities and civil society if it is to be successfully implemented.

In addition to reviewing the major accomplishments and developments of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/228, the present report reviews the pre- and post-Assembly range of tasks of the United Nations programme on ageing and points to the need to improve the institutional capacity of the United Nations system to respond to the tasks set by the Madrid Plan of Action.

In paragraph 33 of the report, several recommendations are made on immediate tasks before the Commission for Social Development to exercise its responsibility for follow-up and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, on initial steps to facilitate international collaboration and coordination of the implementation process, including with the United Nations system, and on resource requirements of the United Nations programme on ageing to fulfil its mandate as the United Nations focal point on ageing to facilitate and promote the Plan of Action.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 56/228, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the full range of tasks of the United Nations programme on ageing of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, with a view to ensuring, as a matter of urgency, that the programme can effectively fulfil its tasks, including those that might arise from the implementation of the outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. In the same resolution, the Assembly also invited all relevant agencies and bodies of the United Nations system to coordinate better their response to the global ageing of populations and to integrate within their respective mandates their programmes and activities related to older persons. Furthermore, the Assembly invited the regional commissions to explore the feasibility of undertaking regional activities with Member States, non-governmental organizations and other relevant actors of civil society in their region to participate in and follow up the Second World Assembly.

2. The present report, after briefly reviewing the major developments and accomplishments of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, outlines the present and continuing tasks of the programme on ageing, as well as those arising from the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. It concludes with a number of recommendations.

II. Second World Assembly on Ageing: review of major developments and accomplishments

3. The Second World Assembly on Ageing was held in Madrid from 8 to 12 April 2002. The Assembly reviewed the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing and adopted a new strategy document to guide policy action on ageing in the twenty-first century — the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. The Assembly also adopted a Political Declaration, focusing on major commitments by Governments towards the implementation of the new Plan of Action.

4. *The first World Assembly on Ageing in 1982* and its Vienna International Plan of Action put the issues of population and individual ageing on the international agenda, focusing primarily on the ageing situation in developed countries from a social welfare perspective. The Second World Assembly in Madrid, in its deliberations and outcome documents paid particular attention to the challenges of ageing in developing countries where the proportion of persons 60 years of age and over is expected to rise to 19 per cent by 2050. It addressed the universal challenges and opportunities of ageing societies in the twenty-first century, especially in the context of development.

5. The International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, is built upon three priority directions: older persons and development, which focuses on the need for societies to adjust their policies and institutions to promote the growing older population as a productive force for the good of society; advancing health and well-being into old age, which underlines the need for policies that promote good health from childhood and onwards throughout the course of life in order to attain a healthy old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments, which promotes policies oriented towards family and community to provide the basis for secure ageing. The Madrid Plan of Action emphasizes the necessity of mainstreaming ageing in global development agendas and encompasses new developments in the social and economic arena that have transpired since the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, in Vienna in 1982.

6. The Madrid Plan of Action is a comprehensive document containing 35 objectives and 239 recommendations for action, primarily addressed to national Governments, but with emphasis on the need for partnerships between Governments, all parts of civil society and the private sector in its implementation. The importance of international action and cooperation is also highlighted. The review and appraisal of the Plan of Action is to be decided by the Commission for Social Development as soon as possible.

7. The Second World Assembly served as a truly global forum on ageing, as can be witnessed from the wide and broad attendance. Government representatives of 159 countries attended, including four heads of State and Government and one Vice-President. Forty-eight government delegations were led by ministers. Representatives of the United Nations

system entities included the Directors-General of the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization (WHO), the Executive Directors of the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, as well as representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Atomic Energy Agency, Habitat, the United Nations Volunteers, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, who all contributed to the work of the Assembly. Around 700 representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as representatives of the private sector, were accredited to the Assembly.

8. Besides the Assembly itself, parallel and associated events took place in Madrid and Valencia. The Valencia Forum, held from 1 to 4 April, brought together researchers and practitioners of gerontology and care of geriatric and aged persons, including the private sector. The Forum adopted the Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-first Century, designed to support the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. The Madrid parallel events included high-level round tables ("Dialogues 2020: the future of ageing"), organized by the Government of Spain, and numerous symposiums, seminars and panel discussions. The NGO Forum on Ageing, convened from 5 to 9 April, was attended by representatives of more than 1,000 national and international non-governmental organizations.

III. Current and future tasks of the United Nations programme on ageing

A. Current tasks

9. The current tasks of the United Nations programme on ageing emanated from the recommendations of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing (1982), as specified in the subsequent mandates of the United Nations legislative and consultative bodies, notably the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and its Commission for Social Development. They fall into the following activities and outputs.

1. Development of new guidelines in the areas of population and individual ageing

10. The United Nations programme on ageing prepares recommendations to guide the development and implementation of policies and programmes on ageing, with particular reference to developing countries and countries with economies in transition. This is achieved through expert consultations and the preparation of reports to United Nations legislative bodies, and publications. For example, in 2002, the programme issued the publication entitled "Sustainable Social Structures in a Society for All Ages"[1] and in 1997, it organized published guidelines for designing practical strategies to address economies in transition. As a contribution to the International Year of Older Persons, the programme, together with the International Institute on Ageing, Malta, issued a publication entitled "Care-giving and Older Persons: Gender Dimensions". All three publications are based on the deliberations of meetings of experts convened by the programme. While the United Nations regular budget has provided for limited activities in this area, bilateral earmarked funding and a limited amount of private sector funding have sustained the majority of these activities to date.

2. Promotion of and substantive support to technical cooperation activities in support of the objectives of the Vienna Plan of Action

11. This area of work includes the management of projects financed through the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing. Following the first World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, the Trust Fund had a relatively large funding base and the programme supported numerous seed-level projects in developing countries and countries in transition. For example, in 1996, the Fund co-financed a project to provide basic needs assistance and occupational and income-generating activities for older Rwandan refugees in five refugee camps in Tanzania. In 1993, the Fund co-sponsored an intergenerational project in the Dominican Republic that provided pre-school education to children in poor communities, staffed by retired teachers. In recent years, however, only funding for specific bilaterally agreed projects has been forthcoming and the

programme has consequently been unable to provide seed-money grants for some time.

3. Exchange of information and experience

12. Specific activities included production of the *Bulletin on Ageing* three times per year until February 2002 (when the newly created *Bulletin on Social Integration Policies* absorbed the *Bulletin on Ageing*, the *Bulletin on Disability* and the *Bulletin on Youth*); construction and maintenance of a web site on ageing; production of a number of non-recurrent publications, including the *World Ageing Situation* series; creation of a database of national policies (with bilateral funding); the development of a research agenda on ageing (with both bilateral and private sector funding); and general liaison with Member States, United Nations system entities and non-governmental organizations. Partnerships with NGOs, Governments and the private sector have included joint sponsorship of meetings and panel discussions, such as the United Kingdom-funded civil society meeting for the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Thailand in November 2001, which was undertaken in partnership with the NGO, HelpAge International, and the two-day public meeting on healthy ageing, co-sponsored with WHO and the private sector.

4. Assessment, review and appraisal

13. The central activity of the programme, as mandated by the Vienna Plan of Action, is the coordination of the quadrennial review and appraisal process, including the preparation, distribution and analysis of questionnaires to Member States, major non-governmental organizations and United Nations system entities, and the preparation of reports to assist the Commission for Social Development in its review and appraisal exercise. The Commission in 2000 decided to postpone this exercise in view of the proposed revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.[2]

14. When the decision to hold the Second World Assembly on Ageing was taken, the major activities listed above, with the exception of the review and appraisal exercise, were maintained even though the programme was charged with both substantive and organizational preparations for the Assembly. Several exploratory projects and initiatives under extrabudgetary resources, such as the aforementioned Internet-based database of policies and programmes on ageing, and the further development of the Research Agenda on Ageing, nevertheless had to be temporarily suspended or delayed owing to the lack of staff resources.

B. Future tasks

15. A number of the programme's future tasks arise from the implementation of the outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, identifies the United Nations programme on ageing in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as the focal point on ageing in the United Nations system with the primary action to facilitate and promote the Plan, including:

- Designing guidelines for policy development and implementation;
- Advocating means to mainstream ageing issues in development agendas;
- Engaging in dialogue with civil society and the private sector;
- Exchanging information.

16. Moreover, the Madrid Plan of Action designates the Commission for Social Development to be responsible for follow-up and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan. As part of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the programme is responsible for substantive servicing of the Commission on issues related to ageing.

17. Accordingly, the overall goal of the programme is to facilitate effective and timely implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. This goal can be achieved through measures of substantive promotion, advocacy and coordination between major actors involved in the implementation of the Plan, including Member States, United Nations system organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector. The following listing identifies concrete future tasks and needed resources for the programme to facilitate the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in accordance with the major responsibilities designated therein.

1. Designing guidelines for policy development and implementation

18. The programme will advance its work in this area aimed at designing policy guidelines along the priority directions and issues of the Madrid Plan of Action and at providing policy recommendations and examples of best practice on specific themes. The programme will accomplish this task through policy research, international expert consultations and the drafting and dissemination of reports and publications. Particular efforts will be made to secure cooperation within the United Nations system. Member States, upon request, will be provided with technical assistance to promote capacity-building, strengthen national institutional mechanisms and formulate national strategies on ageing aimed at implementing and monitoring the Plan of Action.

2. Mainstreaming ageing policy in the development agenda

19. The Madrid Plan of Action clearly identifies population ageing as a global development issue and calls for the mainstreaming of ageing and the concerns of older persons in both national and international policies, programmes and agendas. The Plan of Action calls for the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to include system-wide implementation of mainstreaming of ageing issues in its agenda. The programme will build on this first step and work at bringing the priority issues and recommendations of the Plan to the attention of relevant bodies of the United Nations system, international financial institutions and development banks. The related task is to promote the earliest inclusion of the recommendations contained in the Plan in existing follow-up processes and reviews of major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Declaration, and at the outset of future initiatives. This task will require significant follow-up and coordination with United Nations entities and other international organizations and substantial outreach to United Nations departments and organizations that have not included the ageing dimension in their programmes of work. The programme will also utilize expert consultations and inter-agency meetings to advance the mainstreaming of ageing in the wider social and economic policy agenda.

3. Dialogue with civil society and the private sector

20. The programme will advance and expand its work in this area, particularly through joint initiatives on the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action with major NGOs and research organizations as well as with grass-roots members in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Efforts will be made to expand consultations to include other non-ageing-specific civil society organizations in order to enhance mainstreaming in the non-governmental and private sectors. The programme has already undertaken several initiatives with partial private sector funding, such as the development of the Research Agenda on Ageing. With the expectation that issues concerning population ageing will become more prominent on the international agenda, initiatives on specific topics that are of mutual interest to Governments, civil society and private sector representatives will be undertaken.

4. Exchange of information

21. The programme will promote a wide distribution and publicity campaign for the Madrid Plan of Action and its implementation, not only to Member States, but also to civil society, the United Nations system and other actors, including organizations of older persons. The programme will produce and disseminate a user-friendly version of the Plan of Action and facilitate its translation into as many local languages as possible through United Nations information centre offices and civil society organizations. The programme web site will be enhanced and updated and articles for major professional publications will be written.

C. Further roles for the United Nations programme on ageing

22. As the focal point on ageing in the United Nations system, the programme will also pursue other priorities for action, as defined in the Madrid Plan of Action, to facilitate and promote implementation of the Plan as follows.

1. Translation of the Madrid Plan of Action into regional action plans

23. The Madrid Plan of Action states that United Nations regional commissions have the responsibility for translating the Plan of Action into regional action

plans. The role of the programme is to facilitate and cooperate with regional implementation processes and provide substantive input to translate the Plan into regional activities, as appropriate.

24. In this regard, several activities should be mentioned. The ministerial conference on ageing of the Economic Commission for Europe will take place in Berlin in September 2002, where a regional strategy for implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action will be adopted. The programme participated in a series of preparatory expert meetings and the meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group for the conference. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is currently planning a series of expert meetings leading to a regional assembly in Chile in April 2003 to adopt a regional strategy. The programme is a member of the inter-agency group established to guide this process. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is planning a regional implementation meeting in Shanghai, China, in September 2002. In the Africa region, the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union has adopted a Policy Framework on Ageing (April 2002), to be considered by the heads of State and Government when they meet in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. The programme will engage in dialogue with the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on harmonizing the implementation of the Policy Framework and the Madrid Plan of Action in the ECA region. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia adopted the Arab Plan of Action on Ageing in early 2002.

25. The programme will hold a consultation on interregional approaches to implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in early 2003 to strengthen cooperation between regional commissions and the programme in follow-up of the Second World Assembly on Ageing and implementation of the Plan of Action. Where appropriate, and as resources permit, subregional initiatives to facilitate implementation of the Plan and regional strategies will also be pursued.

2. Monitoring, review and appraisal

26. The Madrid Plan of Action provides that Governments, in cooperation with other stakeholders, are responsible for the review of implementation of the Plan of Action. The Plan does not specify review modalities at the international level, but does call for such modalities to be decided as soon as possible by the Commission for Social Development, which is responsible for follow-up and appraisal.

27. Initial tasks of the programme will include assistance to Member States in their efforts to monitor national implementation of the Plan of Action, including developing national indicators and supporting data, engaging civil society in assisting Member States in assessment measures and updating and upgrading the Internet-accessible database of national policies and programmes established and maintained by the programme.

3. Research and collection of data

28. The Madrid Plan of Action identifies research as a principal component in facilitating the implementation of the recommendations and actions contained in the Plan. Within this task, the efforts of the programme will concentrate on providing Member States with practical tools for the promotion and monitoring of the Plan. These tools include age and gender-specific indicators as well as recommendations for collecting the data required to monitor the implementation of the Plan at different levels (e.g. local, national, subregional). The development of research tools could be particularly useful to support action on ageing in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, whose research resources are limited.

29. The programme will undertake the following activities: (1) further the development of the research agenda on ageing in order to provide the scientific background for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action; (2) maintain, improve and promote the Internet database of policies and programmes on ageing; and (3) explore the feasibility of establishing, in cooperation with other interested parties, including academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, a web site journal of policy research on ageing. The objective of this web site journal is to promote the exchange of research information on ageing among the developing countries and to facilitate cooperation between academic centres concerned with ageing in developed and developing countries and in countries with economies in transition.

4. Resource requirements

30. The Madrid Plan of Action points to the need to improve the institutional capacity of the United Nations system to undertake its responsibilities for implementation of the Plan. The principal challenge for the programme in the implementation of the Plan of Action is to design and undertake measures that succeed in moving ageing issues up on the international policy agenda. To achieve this objective, ageing must be linked to development policies, priorities and needs at all levels. The inclusion of ageing issues in national policy agendas is important and it is critical for Governments to undertake special economic and social initiatives to address the challenges of population ageing. As the United Nations focal point on ageing, the programme will have to lead and coordinate system-wide efforts to assist Governments in undertaking these initiatives.

31. The current staffing of the programme to carry out the tasks of focal point for ageing within the United Nations system, as outlined in the present report, is insufficient. Raising the programme's profile within the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will enable it to give greater attention to ageing as called for in the Madrid Plan of Action and promote its effective implementation.

32. Strengthening the programme would make it possible to carry out the activities outlined above in a realistic manner and would reinforce the capacity of the programme to facilitate and promote the implementation of the Plan of Action. It would, furthermore, enable the programme to reinvigorate and shore up the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing and the capacity to seek other extrabudgetary funding to support new projects.

IV. Recommendations

33. The successful implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, requires effective and timely measures by the United Nations programme on ageing to facilitate and promote the Plan. In this regard, the following recommendations are brought to the attention of the General Assembly for its consideration:

(a) The Commission for Social Development, as the entity responsible for follow-up and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, should commence discussion on how to integrate the different dimensions of population ageing in its work, as requested in the Madrid Plan of Action, and the modalities of reviews and appraisals at its forty-first session in 2003, on the basis of proposals to be prepared by the Secretariat;

(b) The programme on ageing should prepare, through consultations with focal points on ageing of Governments, United Nations system entities, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector, a road map aimed at implementing the Madrid Plan of Action. Such a road map will serve to facilitate international collaboration and promote coordination of the implementation process at international level;

(c) In view of the fact that the Madrid Plan of Action calls for the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to include system-wide implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, in its agenda, the focal points on ageing within the United Nations system should be expanded and strengthened, with the United Nations programme on ageing serving as coordinator;

(d) In view of the full range of tasks of the United Nations programme on ageing arising from the implementation of the outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, as outlined in the present report, and the corresponding measures still needed to make it possible for the programme to fulfil its tasks effectively, the programme should be strengthened, especially with respect to its monitoring and research components and to actions related to liaison and joint activities with NGOs and the private sector.

Notes

[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.2.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (E/2000/26 and Corr.1), chap. I, sect. C, decision 38/100.